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Janice Marie Hollow

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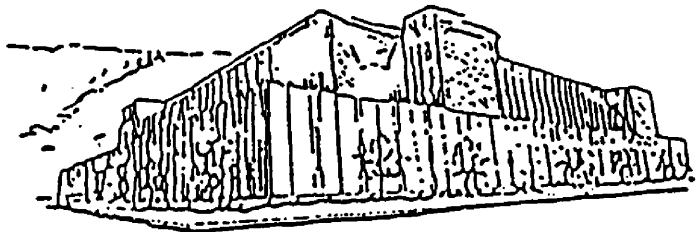
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Janice M. Holler

Date

8/26/96

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SUMER, SCRIBES, AND STORIES

by

Janice Marie Hollow

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presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

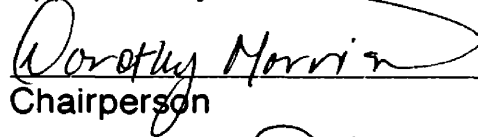
of the degree of

Master of Interdisciplinary Studies
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1996

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"Sumer, Scribes, and Stories" (52 pp.)

Chair: Dorothy Morrison

"Sumer, Scribes, and Stories" integrated a ceramic art project into the study of the beginnings of written language in ancient Sumer. In the project students developed clay techniques, engaged in a step by step process that resulted in a product and demonstrated competence in an artistic area not routinely recognized in the classroom setting.

In a nine week enrichment class, sixth grade students, replicated accounting pots (Ur-pots) used by scribes in Sumer in order to understand the development of symbol systems in written language. Students recorded in clay their "worth in story," by creating their own symbols to represent personal stories and experiences.

This project demonstrated the importance of integrating an art form into the classroom to give students an opportunity to make connections between an abstract concept (symbolic systems in written language) and their personal symbolic systems.

PROJECT INTENT

The project intent of "Sumer, Scribes and Stories" was to integrate arts into the classroom. This project specifically introduced clay into a Language Arts, sixth grade classroom. Traditionally, Language Arts has been taught through reading, writing, recitations, and lectures. The intent in this project was to create a setting for students to actively engage in meaning making through participation in a clay project.

Interwoven into the project was framing personal stories and experience into memory (Bruner 1990: 56). Students made clay tokens (representations in pictograph form) to symbolically represent their stories and life experiences, giving meaning and significance to events and situations. Students actively engaged in problem solving skills and meaning making as they: made personal discoveries; developed self expression; learned from mistakes; engaged in a process that resulted in a product; and connected with a past that propelled them forward. An overview of the project follows.

Historical Background

The scribes of ancient Sumer were the first accountants. They were hired to document Sumerians' personal worth; goats, grain, and oil. The scribes developed tokens, which were symbolic representations in pictograph form, to represent each item of worth. The scribes translated ideas into images and images into ideas and thus began a well-developed system of writing (Kramer 1967: 132).

Sumer was a land rich in clay (clay was the most plentiful raw material in Mesopotamia); the scribes used a lump of clay pinched into a container for the accounting pots. Initially, the tokens were placed inside the hollow clay balls (Ur pots) and a lid was sealed onto the balls (Out of the Past: Signs and Symbols

1993). The Sumerians designed cylindrical seals inscribed with symbols to identify themselves. The seals affixed the lid of the accounting pots; sealing in the tokens. If goats were to be sold, the pot had to be broken open, the token removed, and a new pot made. As the system evolved, tokens were impressed onto the pot, placed inside, and sealed. The seals used to attach the lid not only identified the owner, but were a safety check, ensuring that there was no tampering with the pots. Once opened, the tokens inside were compared with the impressions on the outside of the pot (Chiera 1938: 70-74, 193-199). Five thousand years ago the Sumerians preserved thoughts and experiences to hand to future generations.

Project at Helena Middle School

During the 1995-96 school year, sixth grade students and I created images in clay to preserve our personal stories. We replicated the accounting pots of Sumer and created symbols to impress into the pots to represent our worth in story. Together we explored primary source documents from Sumer (Kramer 1967: 1-13), created pictographs and ideographs to symbolically represent personal stories we valued, and learned clay techniques for creating artifacts to preserve our experiences.

A brief overview of the process follows (for detailed documentation refer to Appendices):

1. Beginnings of written language and introduction of the accounting pot of Sumer (Ur pot).
2. Reader's Theater- based on primary source documents of Sumer.
3. Study of symbols and student creation of symbols to represent their personal stories.
5. Clay techniques for making tokens, seals and pinch pots.

6. Firing and glaze techniques.
7. Student writings about the significance of their story pots.
8. Student audio recording of their favorite story.
9. Design and distribution of show invitations.
10. Hosting the show featuring story pots and writings.
11. Final evaluation of the project and project rubrics.
12. Hands-on experience in polymer clay design making.

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENT AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The primary achievement of this project was integration of clay in the classroom to frame personal stories. The project provided the context for self-expression, personal discoveries, development of clay techniques, and a step by step process that resulted in a product. My design provided a setting for students to demonstrate competence in areas of strength not routinely recognized in the classroom setting.

The 1995-1996 school year was the first year that Helena Middle School students were offered courses during study hall times (talent pools). Talent pools were designed by teachers to offer the students an enrichment activity to replace study hall. My talent pool was described as: "Stories in Clay - Explore and understand historical firsts! Make Ur pots and create tablets of clay to explore how writing began in ancient Sumer. Students will develop an appreciation of the uniquely human achievement of written communication as they symbolically represent their stories in clay."

The accomplishments and achievements of this Creative Project are found in student writings and excerpts from my personal journal, which will give the mood and flavor of the project.

Self-expression: (Student Writing, Appendix B)

"My pot has and brings life to my feelings inside . . . as my memory fades, my pot will set there in my home waiting to tell and share all of the stories surrounding it."

". . . my pot stands for me."

"My pot is very big it means a lot to me because I made it with my own two hands, and it is very unique It is the first thing that I have made that is very neat to me. My pot is like a mystery because I am the only one who will know what's in it and others will wonder."

"My most special token is my cat token. It is about my old cat named Buttons. I had to give him away and I was mostly happy because he was going to a better home."

"... the plane is because my dream is to learn to fly."

Personal discoveries: (Journal Entries, Appendix A)

11-14-95 Clay in the classroom! Students are making their symbols and we continue to ask, "What is important to you? What stories do you have to tell?" They often seem surprised that it is okay to make a symbol representing their violin, technology chip, the sun. I tell them that these are not trick questions! There is not one right answer to the questions. They can be seen and heard saying, "oh, I guess that is important to me." Many symbols were made today and stories were told as the clay was worked to represent the stories.

12-1-95 A marker day in the evolution of this project! The first group of "tokens has been bisqued. Students excitedly gathered up their treasurers and each selected one to test on a two pound communal story pot. Many discoveries were made. Students did their own evaluation of the impressions left by the tokens: lines were too thin, letters were reversed, note symbols were reversed, not enough detail, deep lines look best, more carving in the clay.

Development of Clay Techniques: (Journal Entries, Appendix A)

11-17-95 The kids are beginning to roll on this project. Clay techniques have improved and they understand the symbols are to represent what is important to them and stories from their lived lives. Today there were many musical symbols, suns, moons, cats, dogs, and families.

12-11-95 Each student was given about one pound of clay. Emphasis was placed on the value of the eye in calculating center, roundness - the value of the fingers measuring the wall thickness - Take your time? Begin again, compress the lip, collar in. Feel it! Use your eye- is it round? Are the walls even? Will the opening hold your tokens? Gail (the sixth grade art teacher) said the pinch pots were the most outstanding work she has seen from sixth graders.

12-13-95 ... some students experienced the collapse of their pots because they had not supported the inside of the pots while

imprinting their seals in the still supple clay. Two students took bold steps and collapsed their pots, got new clay, and revisited the shaping, opening, compressing of the new pot. . .

Step by Step Process That Resulted in a Product: (Student Writing, Appendix B)

"Making the pot was like life. We just took it one step at a time."

". . . This pot doesn't have many imprints in it, but it was hard to make so many small tokens. The pot was an effort, having to get the sides even, not getting them too thin or thick. The tokens were hard, getting them the right size." ". . . But all in all, it was fun."

This project created an arena for students to learn clay techniques and engaged them in the study of the evolution of written language as they preserved their stories. Students gave significance to their personal stories as they symbolically embedded them in the Ur pots of Sumer. Christina Ramires (Appendix B) wrote, ". . . It sometimes got frustrating, but that's okay. The best part was actually doing everything. Making the stuff made it more fun and easier to understand about ancient writing."

UNEXPECTED AND EXPECTED RESULTS

An unexpected result of "Sumer, Scribes, and Stories" was my deeper appreciation of the many facets of the project. My intention was not to ignore the presence of the many elements in this project, but to focus on clay in the classroom and the stories embedded in the clay project. I do want to mention some elements of this project that I feel were significant.

Interpersonal and Intrapersonal intelligences (Gardner 1983: 237-276) permeated the project from the initial brainstorming activities to the critical self evaluations on craftsmanship of the student's story pots. Oral and written communication were tools for reflection that enhanced the primary focus of the project.

Symbolic systems are complex and as Gardner (1983: 310) writes, "the means of codifying information that have evolved with a given culture and are now furnished directly to the younger learner". This project explored symbolic expressions in development of the evolution of written language. A look at students' innovative use of symbols and their ability to experiment with the symbol systems we use would be the making of a whole other endeavor.

As a result of the project, I found I was interested in looking more closely at the development of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence (Gardner 1983: 205-236). It would be interesting to design a bodily-kinesthetic continuum of core operations and abilities to aid student's development.

An expected and welcomed result of the clay project was the ownership students assumed of the project. I supplied a framework and initial encounter with the Ur pot. Students added a section on deciphering cuneiform and writing in code and, as described in the journal entry below, threw out what they

considered to be dead wood (Reader's Theater) and cut to the chase - clay.

11-8-95 Students selected primary source reader's theater pieces to prepare and present for the next class. . . 11-10-96 . . . Class began with reader's theater presentations. The class was lack luster and the kids said they were really ready to begin working with clay and were anxious to make their pots. . . . I did not appreciate how anxious they were to work with clay . . . We moved to the art room and began the basics of hand building. (Reader's Theater is a worthwhile project and needs to be after the clay work has been completed.)

Student input into redesigning elements of the project for the next class was encouraged and expected. I selected the Ur pot for student replication because it is primal form (Rawson 1984: 92-100), the scribe's first accounting pot, and I was concerned about time constraints. Students and I felt that the project would have been more enriching if they had been presented with a selection of artifacts from Sumer (Chiera 1938: 70-201). Student choice of artifacts, for capturing their personal stories, would have more actively engaged the kids and given rise to more in depth understanding of the culture of Sumer. I personally liked working on my accounting pot, but my favorite artifact was the clay nail (Chiera 1938: 96). Clay nails were cylinders approximately 10 inches long with affixed eight inch heads. In Sumer these were used as cornerstones to commemorate the deeds of rulers. The scribes covered the surface with as much writing as it could hold. I replicated the clay nail as a cornerstone for my home.

I was surprised by the level of investedness students expressed when writing about their pots as well as their appreciation of quality. Following are examples of student writings from Appendix B:

“. . . My two hands worked hard on sculpting the ball of clay into my first made pot. My two hands made the lid and symbols. So little clay it seemed to take to build such a glorious pot. My pot means so much to me . . . It is the first pot I've ever made.

Everything important to me surrounds my first made pot."

"My pot is very big it means a lot to me because I made it with my own two hands, and it is very unique. It is the first thing that I have made that is very neat to me..."

"When I started my pot it was really looking good but it started to kind of change its shape. I started over 3 times. After that I got it really nice and kept it that way and I think it looks really cool and neat."

Overall, the results of "Sumer, Scribes and Stories" were rewarding and I felt the project was successful for me, as a teacher/artist, and for the students who made a clear statement that they wanted our curriculum to incorporate more arts based projects. As Grete Cannon wrote, "I thank Mrs. Hollow for showing me such a beautiful talent I had in me."

SIGNIFICANCE OF SUMER, SCRIBES, AND STORIES

The significance of this project was that it provided a setting for the study of the origins of written language and personal story telling that: valued multiple intelligences; incorporated the arts; focused on clay techniques and story telling to use and expand bodily-kinesthetics, visual spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences; actively engaged students in a process that demanded that they make personal discoveries and problem solve as they worked toward completion of a product; and, put the students in charge of their own learning.

The intrinsic motivation of every student was demonstrated by their interest, curiosity and enjoyment of the activity for its own sake. All students completed every step of the process and there was 100% parent participation in the culminating show. It should be noted that this was a non-graded class. Students who had missed classes during the nine weeks arranged for their own work time to stay on track with the posted firing schedule.

Students engaged in a real project that had personal meaning to them as they explored another culture through its artifacts and gave meaning and significance to their lived life stories through framing them in clay. They engaged in life skills as they learned strategies for completion of large project, took ownership of the project, and judged their skills. Blair Goyins wrote:

“ . . . Making the pots were like life. We took it one step at a time. My pot is not perfect, but neither is anyones life. . . As I was molding my pot, seals, tokens, etc., I thought of my life, and how it was like clay. Some pieces of clay were hard and dried out fast. Just like hard and not easy to do events in my life. Some pieces of clay were soft and molded right away. Just like easy first try events in my life.”

This project also had a significant effect on the team of teachers that I work with at Helena Middle School. Clay projects are being designed by the math and social studies teachers for the coming school year, we have invested in one hundred pounds of clay and glazes. I think it is also significant that the sixth grade art teacher volunteered to work with me on this project and next year we are planning a clay whistle project to incorporate into a Latin American unit.

Personally significant to me, as a teacher/artist, is achieving the grounding in an art form that enabled me to work in clay with my students. My clay nail, Elsie and Betty "Ur"n , and eight pound communal story pot from this project are meaningful expressions of my grounding process.

LESSONS OF CLAY FOR AN ARTIST/TEACHER

Exploring the Ur pot was a fundamental step in my quest for grounding in ceramic arts. During my second summer in the Creative Pulse program, I serendipitously happened upon a book by Philip Rawson, Ceramics (1984), and was fascinated by the section on the morphology of pots. The Ur pot is the primal pot, all other pot shapes have "memory echoes" reaching back to the Ur pot of ancient Sumer. Morphology of pots was the theme of my second year final project.

I concluded the second summer and did not research the Ur pot further until my third summer, when we were designing optimal experiences. For me, an optimal experience is doing an ERIC search at the library. The Ur pot allurements led me on a search and it is this kind of searching that I want to share with my students. A search to illuminate the past and move us into the future. It became clear that clay in the classroom had to be the primal stuff of my creative project and confirmed the importance of integrating the arts into the classroom curriculum.

I am mysteriously pulled to study the artifacts of ancient cultures. The artifacts are so closely related to the daily lives of the people who formed and used them. Lucy R. Lippard in Overlay (1983:12), writes, "there is a mysterious element to wondering about the past . . . something seems to flow back to us through these places - which we see as symbols of lost symbols . . . recall function of art by looking back to times and places where art was inseparably from life."

Overlay has been enlightening and answered many of the questions I have had regarding my interest in artifacts. I enjoy the research and the subsequent

making . In my personal work I make utilitarian forms and appreciate the artful design of utilitarian forms out of the past. There is a particular importance to me that they were personal objects, individually owned, made, and used in daily life.

“In the arena of my own becoming” (Green 1994), I will continue my journey in ceramic arts and guide my students through the many steps of clay work. As technology takes precedence over the human crafting of daily items I will continue to emphasize the beauty and importance of human touch for human use and appreciation.

RESEARCH DOCUMENTATION

The following journal entries are put before the reader either in full form or in the form of essential excerpts. Hopefully, this will give the mood and flavor of the implementation of my Creative Project. The entries are in chronological order, however, topics may change from one entry to the next.

(Journal Entry) We have our long class schedule this week, four class periods with one group of students. We are reading Sparrow Hawk Red, by Ben Michelson and working on character sketches. I used a new method of color coding the four ways an author makes a character come to life. Students had written about the stories main character, themselves, a combination of four students, and created a new character. This week I have experimented with students creating characters in clay to compliment our character studies. Two classes wrote about a new character and then sculpted the character in clay; two of the classes sculpted their characters and then wrote about their characters. My observation is that sculpting first is a more productive product. Students talk about their character as it takes shape. Each addition to the sculpting adds to their character sketch. We culminated the sculpting and character sketches with a gallery walk to view the work.

(Journal Entry) I am including the discussion of two projects

because I feel these steps might be necessary for my personal processing. I sought funding for Shakespeare in the Schools, organized a school wide assembly, and met with the building English teachers to prepare introductory materials and organize the workshops that would follow the production. I was the building coordinator for an Artist in Residence and organized five days of building wide workshops for students and teachers. Working to facilitate large school activities demands that I be precise and organized - this is certainly something that I have given much thought to and agree that I need to take others through the step by step evolution of my ideas !!!!! This has truly forced me to be pedantic and not random abstract. Working with the English Department in my building is always rewarding because they are generally task masters and need to have all of the little details completed. I like having large group meetings where I facilitate the discussion - this works for me. Either it is necessary for personal process or I am avoiding the upcoming talent pool which will implement my plan for my Creative Project. I still have not rewritten my project, addressing the issues raised by the faculty. I have read and reread the questions and agree that it would be more cohesive to have students tell their personal stories in clay - not create characters to use as spring boards for writing. I took a walk

over lunch to process all of the activities that I am organizing at HMS and to ask myself why I need to have so many irons in the fire at a time when I should be focusing on my creative project. I decided that it is all part of the Arts Education mind set -- the more, the more we see.

(Journal Entry) The talent pool was described as: "Sumer, Scribes, and Stories" - Explore and understand historical firsts! Make Ur pots and create tablets of clay as you explore how writing began in ancient Sumer. Students will develop an appreciation of the uniquely human achievement of written communication as they capture their stories in clay and use them as "spring boards" for writing.

(Journal entry) the dye is cast . . . the Talent Pool letters have gone home with the students. I have begun etching this project in stone!!! How to collect student's stories has been one of my long thought about issues. This must be something that can realistically happen in the classroom and not be a management nightmare for myself, the students, or the collaborating art teacher.

(Journal Entry) I have 26 students signed up for the talent pool. the clay has been ordered - I decided to use earthen ware because the Sumerians did not glaze the Ur pots and the redness of the earthenware will give the pots a more interesting color than the regular low fire stone ware. A new book, Mapping Inner Space by

Nancy Margulies, M.A. (1991), has been an immense help in suggesting ways to guide the students down the path to symbolism. I am looking forward to seeing a great deal of growth in the students ability to illustrate and use symbols for concepts - Leading to the use of symbols to represent stories in their lives as captured in the metaphor I have selected, the Ur pot from ancient Sumer. Overlay (1983), has been enlightening and answers many of the questions I have had regarding my interest in artifacts from the past - my field project last year had the students replicating Aztec artifacts. I love the research and the depth of understanding one gets from creating the artifacts and discovering its purpose in a culture.

(Journal Entry) I have two very important contacts: the first is a sixth grade art teacher from Helena Middle School, Gail Graham. She is going to assist me with the project. She has been very excited about the project since I discussed it with her last spring. She is going to participate in the project and assist with her artistic expertise. The second contact was made at a workshop at the Holter Museum. Sandy Casey, an art teacher from Helena high School, was looking for teacher/artists interested in mentoring senior art students. I have requested students that use personal narrative in their artistic works.

As the project unfolds, through journal documentation, both the

mentor program and collaboration with the art teacher will be discussed with more detail. Suffice to say that the collaboration with Gail Graham, art teacher, on the project offered spiritual support. Gail's expert aid, generous support and cooperation were embraced by me with open arms.

(Journal Entry) 9-26-95 Anxiety dreams have not visited for more than twenty years. Had to get to school. running late. John and I are trying to leave the house. We arrive at the school. Huge - vacant - hallway like a maze. It must be here, my room. run down halls . . . Rex needs to be fed . . . Dawn.

(Journal Entry) Time to stop all of the embellishments! Work on the project as designed! Procrastination and avoidance are things of my past - keep them there. Second quarter begins 11-4-95! Make every day count, it's time to see a product.

(Journal Entry) Second quarter is four and one half weeks away. The classroom component of this project is well in hand and I am confident in its efficacy. On the other hand, the teacher artist is scared stiff (green ware). I am debating whether or not to hire one of the Bray residents to tutor me through the hand building in my classroom. I feel that my art project must certainly be significant, even in size. I have made some decisions about my Ur pot: 1., it must be consistent with those of the students; 2., I must work on the

project during class time; 3., the Sumer tokens must also be significant, I am thinking about making them intricate and then applying them onto the clay body.

(Journal Entry)10-23-95 Well, well, well, my busy mind has finally settled down to allow the rhythm of the wheel to spin a product. "Clay nails" are drying on the Bray shelving - nail heads await my words that will be etched in stone. This word gathering to be etched in stone has been a difficult task. However, my task analysis has been good and is leading me forward. The realization that artifacts are very important to me - the past of ancient Sumer is propelling me forward in the framing of my personal narrative. "Clay Nails" the ancient cornerstones of Sumer.

The allurement of using the "Clay Nails" and the Sumerians style of including everything and anything on the cornerstones made the writing on my cornerstone somewhat of a celebration. I always wanted something etched in stone (ware) and this is it. I referred to my assessment paper of July 21, 1995, because as the faculty pointed out, I had begun working on my Creative Project. Following is the text for the cornerstone:

Friends gathered, Ed, Stu, the Samoans, Bob and Harry, to help in the building of this house at 800 2nd. the house took on its physical definition and the beginnings of a new home.

Moving in was a homecoming from Samoa and time to reunite with lost treasures. Tyler, in kindergarten, and

O'Brien in second grade took the trail over Sugar Loaf's saddle to school.

Fourteen years later gardens are in, trees give shade, buffalo grass has reseeded and the house has new paint. This Christmas O'Brien will be home from OSU and Tyler from ACI. Homecomings! J. Hollow October, 1995

The cornerstone will be embedded at the edge of the house; weaving together two very different cultures and the beginning of making art inseparable from life at 800 2nd.

(Journal Entry) 11-6-95 Twenty-six students embarked upon a great journey - "Their Worth in Story." Class began by students individually brainstorming symbols (illustrated); followed by a gallery walk to add to their collection of symbols. We then viewed a video, Out of the Past - Signs and Symbols. The video gives a great introduction to the importance of symbols in today's culture and highlights the people of Sumer and the evolution of the first written language. Students were given copies of Chapter 2, "Symbols and Drawing" from Mapping Inner Space (Margulies 1991), and were asked to create symbols representing their materialistic worth (accounting).

(Journal Entry) 11-8-95 Class began with Gail Graham's (art teacher) telling about a night of dreaming symbols. I told stories about my aunts Elsie and Betty and showed the symbols I had selected to represent the stories. The brainstorming activity from

Monday was reviewed. Most of the class time was used for discussion and student sharing of symbols. It was immediately apparent, from the student's discussion of the symbols they had made to represent their worth in material goods, that they had made the leap to more abstract symbols of worth such as friends, love, and family. Students selected primary source reader's theater pieces to prepare and present for the next class. These pieces were from The Beginning of Civilization in Sumer: The Advent of Written Communication, by Joan Parrish (1991), a cooperative research program of the University of California, Los Angeles and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Samuel Noah Kramer in his book History Begins at Sumer (1967) has some wonderful Sumerian stories; "The First Case of Juvenile Delinquency," "The First Schools," "The First Case of Apple-Polishing." Several students selected these stories to read for background information on the people of Sumer.

(Journal Entry)11-10-95 Class began with reader's theater presentations. The class was rather lack luster and the kids said they were really ready to begin working with clay and were anxious to make their pots. This activity (reader's theater) should be moved to the end of the quarter; I guess I did not appreciate how anxious they were to work with clay. We moved to the art room and Gail

gave the basics of hand building (half of the class had already had Gail for their quarter of art). Students began creating their symbols. Sara Seacat's heart with her parent's initials was very moving for me. The students will now move this plan into their plan and make my research and planning come to life.

(Journal Entry) 11-13 -95 I took (or rather gave myself the give of) a day at the Bray. We were scheduled to fire the wood soda kiln, but Josh moved the firing back to Tuesday. Instead of hauling wood I made four, two pound story pots and one eight pound pot. The project has now taken on its owl life force. This is a rich dig! The eight pound pot will hopefully be the container for our collective stories - I know that I look forward to showing the students my thrown pots. The life force in the project is what I am now looking forward to. The student's implementation of the symbols is exciting and very touching. I began the symbol project very concretely - what are you worth in material "things" (the accounting pot idea). They have moved away from the concrete into the more abstract - love between parents, friendships. I did not comment that I was surprised that there were no Nike or Guess symbols in their personal collections. Actually, I am impressed that these socioeconomic symbols are not present.

(Journal Entry) 11-14-95 Clay in the classroom! Students are

making their symbols and we continue to ask: What is important to you? What stories do you have to tell? They often seem surprised that it is okay to make a symbol representing their violin, technology chip, the sun. I tell them that these are not trick questions! There is not one right answer to the questions! They can be seen thinking and heard saying, "oh-I guess that is important to me." Many symbols were made today.

(Journal Entry) 11-15-95 I spent some time looking through magazines for simple representations of ideas - Sierra Club was loaded, New Yorker was good, Language Arts Journal had nothing (Howard Gardiner's name occasionally appears).

(Journal Entry) 11-16-95 I selected magazines from the school library to demonstrate ways of collecting ideas for symbols. Mountain Biking World and Sports Illustrated for Kids had great examples; table of contents were done only in symbols. This weekend the kids will go through their magazines and begin their collection. Next week we will begin working on individual seals.

(Journal Entry) 11-17-95 The kids are beginning to roll on this project. Clay techniques have improved and they understand the symbols are to represent things that are important to them and stories from their lived lives. Today there were many musical symbols, suns, moons, cats, dogs, and families.

(Journal Entry)11-17-95 It is wonderful working with an art teacher! Gail and I talked today about the progress of our personal story pots. I said, "I am still organizing and gathering . . . not ready to begin making my personal symbols. . . I need to have everything ready - sketches, ideas, stories, before I can begin creating symbols." Gail said she was the same way. "Maybe it is an adult thing," I said. I wasn't sure and if it wasn't just an adult thing then why am I teaching the class in the push ahead - get the symbols finished mode? Gail and I will reflect on our teaching styles and check directly with the students. Monday, or Wednesday before Thanksgiving will be good days to process with the students.

(Journal Entry)12-1-95 A marker day in the evolution of this project! The first group of "tokens" had been bisqued. Students excitedly gathered up their treasures and each selected one to test on a two pound communal story pot. Many discoveries were made. Students did their own evaluation of the impressions left by the tokens: lines were too thin, letters were reversed, note symbols were reversed, not enough detail, deep lines look best, more carving in the clay. Most students began working on their seals. Seals are a collection of their most important symbols- seals came to represent the major stories that they had to tell. I asked them if they wanted to slow down the clay work and collect more symbols before

beginning the pinch pots. They overwhelming said that they were ready to continue and everyone wanted to make the pinch pots as soon as possible.

(JOURNAL ENTRY) 12-7-95 Everyone is finishing their last "tokens" (the kids like this term and use it when referring to their symbols). I distributed a two page hand-out (The Complete Potter's Companion) on making pinch pots. The visuals are excellent - a cross section of a thumb opening the Ur pot.

(Journal Entry)12-11-95 Students gathered around their newly bisqued tokens - each collecting their stories. The kids realized early on that there was no need to put names on the tokens, each is so uniquely theirs. I have told Betty stories about learning to drive and hitting mail boxes . . . Betty never flinching just redirecting. Elsie stories about making cinnamon rolls - the air and floor dusted with flour. Tyler story of, "The Dog With the Big Teeth." Each student was given about one pound of clay. Emphasis was placed on the value of the eye in calculating center, roundness - the value of the fingers measuring the wall thickness - Take your time! begin again, compress the lip, collar in. Feel it! Use your eye - is it round? Gail said this is the most outstanding work she has seen!! Roxie (the fourth year art students from Helena High School was more involved today. She worked with two students to form pinch

pots. She does not seem to like middle school kids. Roxie has been here three times and although she talks to me about what I am doing she assumes the role of an observer even though she has been invited to join in the activity . At the end of class she stayed around to help clean up and we discussed what she would like to observe. She said she had decided that she would really like to work with young handicapped students!!!! I am going to get her into the Preschool, self contained special education program for the rest of her hours. Turn around is fair play - I was looking for help from Roxie and instead I will get the opportunity to help Roxie get into an area of education for which she has a passion.

(Journal Entry)12-12-95 Teacher as Artist! One of my envelopes for this creative project will certainly be the collected stories of my students, one eight pound pot. Several small groups have collected their stories on thrown pots. I think that I too will use the pinch pots for collecting stories. I have decided that my work in class should parallel the student's work in size and content The size is right for accounting. The Elsie and Betty pot is certainly a marker pot - in some ways a more formal URn that contains their passing.

O'Brien (my son) has talked about the difficulty of capturing all of his stories in writing. Does the writing somehow diminish the fluidity of a personal story? Symbols are good containers for

words that ebb and flow in a story. After writing about O'Brien it will be interesting to see how kids react to the computer lab where they will be asked to write about what their story pot means to them. We will culminate the project with each student's audio taping their favorite story. (Bruner) Perhaps writing etches it in stone while storytelling forges links between the exceptional and ordinary - links that may be relinked in the real or imaginary. Relinked by our personal prisms.

I just like the feeling of the UR pot that can be held in the palm of one hand - held in the palm of two small hands. Visions of grandchildren careening around with, "Tell me this story," in their eyes. I need to create an evaluation sheet for this project - - something sixth grade friendly.

(Journal Entry) 12-13-95 Today was a climax for this adventure. all tokens have been bisqued, pinch pots were perfected, tokens were pressed into the two collective story pots and then it was the thrill of the chase, "I am ready to imprint my tokens onto my pot," said eight students at once. I made a large slab to collect all of the stories on tablets of clay before they were sealed forever into the students envelopes. Then . . . some students experienced the collapse of their pots because they had not supported the inside of their pots while imprinting their seals in the still supple clay. Two students

took bold steps and collapsed their pots, got new clay and revisited the shaping, opening, compressing of the new pot. The beauty of clay, nothing ventured nothing gained. A parent came into watch with amazement - I said she was always welcome - the more mentors the merrier. I set Roxy up with Peggy Hollow-Phelps at the special education preschool for 12-20, 12:00 to 3:00.

(Journal Entry)I spent the afternoon at St. Helena's Cathedral and Elementary School sketching. I had not noticed before that the area above the doors of the cathedral is a pontiff's hat. The steps to the Elementary School are so memorable. I was the first girl in my class to jump from the top. I still like the idea of etching in clay places that are important to me: Cathedral, St. Helena's, HMS, tunneled ski lifts, tipi, ava. the Bray, smoke stacks, game cupboard, "the ridge", gardens, Samoa, tobacco fields, buffalo gap. . .

(Journal Entry)1-2-95 My Christmas presents from O'Brien and Tyler were the Ur story pots! They began slowly - O'Brien frustrated by his representations, Tyler frustrated by the time consumption of such a project. They both continued to work on their symbols, both making it clear that they were not going to tell the accompanying stories. The night before they left, pots and symbols were united - literally and figuratively the pots are story filled. Their pots are very individualistic - they are no longer, "the boys." These are, men,

O'Brien and Tyler, etching their ways across the landscape. Actually, they made this pot business seem very simple - it reduced some of my anxiety as I begin my larger pot.

(Journal Entry) 1-2-96 Today two students, Katherine and Emily put the finishing touches on their pots. The rest of us wrote about what our pots and seals meant to us - They are the final evaluation of this project. (Appendix B) They pots are glazed and the kiln is loaded.

(Journal Entry) 1-4-96 Today we discussed the firing process and set the 17th as the unveiling. Students solved some cuneiform codes and we looked at the pictorial origin of ten cuneiform signs from The Beginning of Civilization in Sumer: The Advent of Written Communication and rewatched the video, Out of the Past: Signs and Symbols. Many of the students commented that the video made a lot more sense than it did after their first viewing early on in this project. I said I always get something new from it each time I watch it. They agreed that they would be more enthusiastic about the reader's theater at this point in the process - if we are engaging and exploring it is the answer . . . mistakes become part of the process.

This was a non-graded class, however, we had set standards throughout the process which I formalized on the following rubric.

Student:_____Period_____

**STORIES, SUMER, AND SYMBOLS
MULTIDIMENSIONAL EVALUATION**

Reader's Theater

1	2	3	4	5
Did not perform with understanding		Shown understanding in reading-brought some life to reading		Performed & read to enrich meaning

Mind Mapping & Symbol Collection

1	2	3	4	5
Collected few symbols did not always relate to selected story		Collected symbols that usually related to story		Many symbols to represent stories

Clay Hand Building Techniques for Symbols and Seals

1	2	3	4	5
Symbols obscure Reversals Thin lines		Symbols were identifiable/visible markings/no reversals		Vivid & meaningful Great impressions on Ur story pot

Pinch Pots (Ur Pots)

1	2	3	4	5
Not hollowed out Wall thickness varied No compression		Adequate opening Walls uneven Lip uneven		Great receptacle Consistent thickness Good compression, Lip even

History of Cuneiform in Sumer

1	2	3	4	5
What is it?		5,000 years ago Some kind of accounting Cuneiform First written language		Role of Scribe Accounting system-Ur Symbol system Pictograph to cuneiform Beginning written lang.

Story on Audio Tape

1	2	3	4	5
Difficult to select Little importance to student		Sequenced story Important to student		Vivid, detailed story Actively engaged in story telling

Written Response - The Importance of the pots

1	2	3	4	5
Stories not important		Some detail re importance of stories		Personal attachment "life in action"

This rubric format is one I often use in classes. The students and I set the criteria for 1, 3, 5; 2 and 4 are implied. Everyone agreed that Reader's Theater needed to be moved to the end of the project. I would like to spend more time looking at periodicals for symbols, but they did not think this was necessary. Everyone wanted to spend more time deciphering cuneiform. I had a student write a thank you note in code.

I paired the rubric with a flow evaluation sheet. When it comes to assessing skills needed to function in a productive way in our society I think the flow questions are extremely valuable in helping students evaluate their thinking processes as well as their behavior.

ARE YOU IN FLOW?

Following is a short list of elements and conditions that lead to a flow experience. Please rate your experiences on a scale from 1 to 5-5 being high.

1	2	3	4	5
Instructions were clear to me				
1	2	3	4	5
Clay gave me opportunities for immediate feedback				
1	2	3	4	5
My skills were suited to the task				
1	2	3	4	5
The clay project held my attention				
1	2	3	4	5
The information given held my attention				
1	2	3	4	5
I felt ownership in my clay project				
1	2	3	4	5
I learned something new				
1	2	3	4	5
I felt successful				
1	2	3	4	5
I was not distracted during the project				
1	2	3	4	5
I would like to do more of these kinds of projects				

(Journal Entry) 1-17-96 I unloaded the kiln. The once large array of tokens looks so small! Everything is in its container - does this minimize what we did? All the steps and parts of the whole? I don't like the sheen of the glaze - remember to bow to the force of fire! These pots are filled with human touch! I have an overwhelming feeling of "let down." The process was so much bigger than the product. Some of this feeling must be relief!! My vision has been implemented. Time to write it up and move on. . . My team planned an interdisciplinary unit today and they referred to my pots and the use of symbolic language. The social studies teacher is going to make Pacific Northwest totem poles and will use the process from Mapping Inner Space to design symbols. Gail Graham has invited me to participate in designing the NAMES Quilt signature piece - Symbols that represent Helena.

(Journal Entry) 2-29-96 Leap Year! I look back through the earliest pages of this journal - so many thoughts, sincere enough, is it big enough, is it enough? The purpose was to footprint - record the process, record the thinking and now it is time to move on.

(Journal Entry) 3-22-96 Whitefish. The task analysis and implementation were the easy parts! Learning from my third year assessment and not using so much implication has left me enclosed in my UR pots. A life long friend and my alter ego has helped break

the seal! In one of our casual conversations I explained my impasse and in her usual cut to the chase way she told me what I knew I had to do next - make a quick outline and fill in the specifics later. Stephanie always makes me feel wonderful and lucid! (If only temporarily!) After I finished the outline, Steph asked if she could see it. Of course! Her response was reassuring, "You have done a lot of work on this project!" Stephaine is a writer and we decided that I should create and implement projects and she would sit upstairs with her computer and write them--sounds great to me!

Journal Entries were part of the foot printing process. Another part was photographing the project (Appendix C). The slides highlight the project, as well as two areas not covered in journaling; making of invitations and our show. I photographed the project for two reasons: I knew I wanted to present this as part of a multi-dimensional creative project; and, this is the first year my building has had students involved in talent pools. I wanted to have slides of kids absorbed in a clay project that involved taking facts about an historical first (written language) and making a product based on the information which would be unique to each student. I presented this slide show to two hundred parents of incoming fifth graders, teachers, and administrators.

Students designed invitations by making prints of their favorite symbols and hand wrote invitations for parents, team members, and administrators. The students selected the time, 7:15 a.m. - a time when most parents, brothers and, sisters would be able to attend. I was in charge of setting up the show; they wanted to be surprised and it was my gift to them for their commitment to the project. Tables were covered in earthen toned burlap and each accounting pot was placed in one of my Samoan baskets (a new kind of offering up for me). We made cards identifying our pots and wrote papers on the personal importance of the pots (Appendix B). We had a 100% parent turn out - most signed in on our clay tablets - and of course our entire team of students and teachers toured the exhibit. It was rewarding watching the kids stand by their work explaining and answering questions. Yes, it was big enough. The show was time for me to be part of a celebration, time to hear parents telling their children that they had done a wonderful job; smile at a parent saying that they did not know before that their child did not like football; time to enjoy the processes of communication.

As students came into my room to pick up their story pots after the show, each student audio taped a story about their favorite symbol. As a class, we listened with delight to the stories.

The last day of class Margaret Regan, a local jewelry designer,

gave the students a hands on experience with polymer clay designing. This was a great way to end the class, giving the students another outlet for their hand building techniques with a clay that could be fired in their home ovens.

BLAIR GOYINS

To me, my pot is a life. My life. Making the pots was like life. We just took it one step at a time.

My pot is not perfect, but neither is anyones life. If your life were perfect, it would be boring. Just like your pot would be.

I had fun making my pot, seeing and showing my life in pictures. A story in clay.

As I was molding my pot, seals, tokens, etc., I thought of my life, and how it was like clay. Some pieces of clay were hard and dried out fast. Just like hard and not easy-to-do events in my life. Some pieces of clay were soft and molded right away. Just like east-first-try events in my life.

What I am trying to say is, my pot is my life, made and lived by me.

Katie Spalinger

My pot was kind of hard for me. When I started, I couldn't think of very many symbols or stories. It kind of upset me that I was behind. I think my pot explains me.

My pot is special to me. When I was behind I tried to work faster. In the end I came up with a lot of ideas. I had a full pot at the end!

I liked making my pot because I have never had the chance to do something like that. I hope I can have more experiences like this one. I worked hard on my pot, and I liked the way it turned out!

Brooke Anderson

When I started my pot it was really looking good but it started to kind of change it's shape. I started over 3 times. After that, I got it really nice and kept it that way and I think it looks really cool and neat. My stories represent what I like.

Grete Cannon

"What my pot means to me"

My pot is made from clay. My two hands worked hard on sculpting the ball of clay into my first made pot. My two hands made the lid and symbols. So little clay it seemed to take to build such a glorious pot. My pot means so much to me.

My pot is kept at the bottom of my heart that's how much it means to me. It is the first pot I've ever made. Everything important to me surrounds my first made pot.

Each symbol brightens up to glorify my pot to the heavens. When I close up the pot it was like shutting the gate to the heavens.

I thank Mrs. Hollow for showing me such a beautiful talent I had in me.

Sam Dorsi

To me my pot means that I enjoy looking out windows, I like technology and lizards are cool. Partially blocked on my pot is the world, showing my love of geography and peace. Near the top of the pot is a present, saying that I like surprises. Also on my pot is my bass, with perfect upper bouts. In the middle of my pot are the stairs I fell down when I was little.

On my seal stands my technology symbol, my bass, and the mountains near my home, a lizard and a symbol showing my family.

In conclusion, my pot stands for me.

Kathryn Heilman

My pot has and brings life to my feelings inside. I will place it on my shelf above my bed, it will bring wonders to my dreams and thoughts to other people's minds. Down a road I will walk in life, as my memory fades, my pot will set there in my home waiting to tell and share all of the stories surrounding it. The stories will flow through people's minds as soft as silk, they will laugh and maybe just sit there and let my pot do the work.

Marah Connole

My pot shows many things. The people around me. My family, friends, neighbors, and even people I don't know. The environment around me also plays a very important role in my life. Where I live, what kind of people and animals that surround me are important. What sort of activities, hobbies and sports make me what I am. All of these things tie together into something called my life.

Kari Ridle

Stories in Clay

To me, my pot represents my good and bad things that happened in my life. I have two tokens I didn't include on the pot, so there are a few blank spaces on my pot.

My seal to me, represents my family. They are very special to me, and this was one of the ways to show it.

I also liked imprinting all my tokens on my pot. My most special token is my cat token. It is about my old cat named Buttons. I had to give him away, and I was mostly happy because he was going to a better home.

My favorite thing that I did was making the pots and tokens. It was an experience that I won't forget, and wouldn't mind doing it again.

Shea Gooch

My pot is like a mountain, a little uneven but full of ideas. It has trees which are like memories. The rocks are the way I feel about things. The top of the mountain is like me struggling to get through the warm and the cold weather. The weather bites but always blooms.

Greg Freistadt

The symbols on my seal are two people, which stand for friends. Another one is a train with tracks in front of it, I put that on because I like trains, and have a train set. The last thing that is on my seal is a bike, and I put that on because I really like riding my bike.

My symbols on my pot are a food symbol. And also a family symbol and some other ones.

Lisa Menzies

My pot has a lot of meanings to me. It has all my stories on it. All my friends and family are on it. It also has times when I felt sad or happy, times I lost a pet or lost a friend, and it has a lot of love and hard work put in to it.

Nick Shontz

My pot means time , music, life, sun, rain, relatives, Montana, the world, family, friends, memories (like moving), learning, vacations and troubles. My pot means a lot to me, good and bad times I've had. I'm glad to be in talent pool.

Emily Michalski

Story in Clay

My pot means a lot to me. It represents my lifetime stories, my excitement and joy, my sadness and tragedies. It has special meanings, even the stamps or symbols have special meanings. My pot may not look like much to you but it means a lot to me. It has symbols that I would never tell anyone about and symbols that I could tell everyone in the whole world about. I am going to put my pot in the living room so that everyone who comes over will get to see my pot. And I will tell them "there are symbols on the inside that are on the outside right now. When you shake my pot you will get to hear the neat noise that it makes." My pot is very special to me and means a lot to me.

Sara Seacat

This pot is special to me because I worked hard making it. It took a lot of effort. Sometimes your clay wouldn't work the way you wanted it to and other times the clay was perfect. This pot is always going to mean a lot to me. It has some stories and important things that happened to me in my life, like love, my family, my house, and my way of living. These pots will be fun to look back at and remember what happened just by looking at the symbols that we pushed in. I'll probably give this pot to my mother. My mother takes care of things well. This way I can see it still and it will be in one piece.

Christina Ramirez

My pot is kind of special to me because it shows what I want to remember. It tells stories, it shows symbols. It's not beautiful, or artistic, but that doesn't matter. This pot doesn't have many imprints in it, but it was hard to make so many small tokens. The pot was an effort, having to get the sides even, not getting them to thin or thick. The tokens were hard, getting them the right size, and putting the handles on. But all in all, it was fun. You even could talk a lot also, unless you were told to be quiet by the teachers. It sometimes got frustrating, but that's okay. The best part was actually doing everything. Making the stuff made it more fun and easier to understand about ancient writing.

Robert Olsen

My pot means to me how interesting stories about your life can come to you if you just think for awhile. It also means how creative you can be by putting your stories into little images and have whole childhood of stories to tell. My symbols mean to me what were things special and exciting.

Christine Turner

My pot is very big it means a lot to me because I made it with my own two hands, and it is very unique. It is the first thing that I have made that is very neat to me. My pot is like a mystery because I am the only one who will know what's in it and others will wonder.

Mikale Leuwer

My pot means everything that I could think of from my life and what I want to happen in my life. I added little things that mean nothing to anyone else but me like little things that might seem stupid that were funny at the time. I think if we did not have a limit on time we would do much better or thought about them a lot more.

My seal has all the sports that mean something to me. Soccer because because I'm on a team and I play soccer. Basketball means something to me because I hate basketball, but I have to play it to keep in shape for soccer. Football means a lot because my dad played football in college and I want to be like him but play soccer in college.

Kelly Atkins

My pot has things important to me. The "Stick-figure" is to represent family because I love to be around family. I did my trumpet because I love playing it and music is one of my favorite things.

The exclamation mark is for fun. The plane is because my dream is to learn to fly.

My seal has mountains and trees because I love to be in the forest. It has waves because I like to be around water. There is a bird because birds are one of my favorite creatures. The cloud is because I like to watch storms.

I really enjoyed making the pot and symbols.

Appendix B

Christina Meyer

My pot has a lot of memories for all my special times in my life. All the special moments and the hard times although it doesn't look like much, it tells my whole story of my life. All the fun things. All the hard things and most of all it tells my feelings. It tells my hobbies and my lifestyle. It tells what I want to do all my life and what I have to do. But the most important thing is those four faces on my seal. They go in order from my dad down to my mom then across to my sister (the really scrunched one) then up to my brother. They don't go in any particular order. I love them all the same and that's what my pot tells me.

Kate Wandel
Stories in Clay

I made my story pot because I thought it was a good way to share the stories of my life, and the things I've been through.

My personal seal is a picture of me on water with the sun and birds in the sky. I feel peace when I'm on the water. The tears on my pot represent the sad and unhappy times in my life. The happy/smiley face on my pot represents the happy and very joyful times in my life

I need to thank Mrs. Hollow, my comm. arts and talent pool teacher, for selecting me for this course. It was a marvelous and fun experience.



24 h



18

16



14

10



17

2



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